

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

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September 14, 2004

Hon. Peter B. Foor, Presiding Judge
Solano County Superior Courts
Hall of Justice
600 Union Avenue
Fairfield, CA 94533

County Administrator/Office of Emergency Services Response to the 2003/2004 Solano County Grand Jury Final Report Regarding "Emergency Services"

Dear Judge Foor:

The County Administrator and Office of Emergency Services generally concur with the findings of the Grand Jury and will respond to those findings that have recommendations as outlined below.

Finding #1: There is an Emergency Operating Plan for the County and each city. However, the plans vary and there seems to be no consistency among the county and cities regarding the training relating to Emergency Operating Procedures and new mandates from U.S. Department of Homeland Security. (1)(2)(6)

Recommendation #1: To ensure that each agency is in compliance with California and U.S. emergency requirements, one agency should take the lead to insure that the appropriate training, exercises and guidelines are established and implemented. Due to the fact that the County has a dedicated employee for Emergency Services, it is logical that the County Office of Emergency Services take the lead in this endeavor. Currently, agencies meet to discuss response and mutual aid. It is recommended that the review of agency operational plans and procedures be presented at these meetings to ensure each agency is within State and U.S. standards.

Response: The Solano County Office of Emergency Services (OES) currently has no authority in regard to how cities develop their emergency plans. OES strongly encourages

each city to collaborate in such a fashion that all emergency plans within the Solano Operational Area are compliant with the state Standard Emergency Management System (SEMS) and that these plans are compatible with the County plan.

Finding #2: Within some agencies, there seems to be confusion about who would activate the EOC and who has authority to make appropriate and crucial decisions relating to the necessary response, material, supplies and the request for mutual aid. (2)

Recommendation #2: The County Administrator (CAO) and each City Manager should review and define their respective emergency administrative roles and clearly communicate these responsibilities to members of the EOC team.

Response: The Solano County Emergency Operations Plan approved by the Board of Supervisor's on August 24th, 2004 clearly defines who can activate the Solano County Emergency Operations Center. The EOC has been and is currently using the Standardized Emergency Management System that is required by the State and the Incident Command System. The SEMS system clearly defines the roles and responsibilities of each function within the EOC. The Emergency Plan for each city should also define who can activate the EOC within their jurisdiction. The County has no authority to mandate this as a requirement for cities.

Finding #3: If an emergency incident should escalate beyond the agency's capacity and the need to request mutual aid from another agency should be necessary, the current communication systems would hamper responsibilities, as each agency's communication system operates independently with no coordination and little interoperability among police, fire and medical agencies. This finding was part of the 2002-2003 Solano County Grand Jury Report. It appears that no progress has taken place to rectify this problem. (3)(4)

Recommendation #3: The U.S. Department of Homeland Security has made it clear that funding is available for a variety of needs at the local level, but the process to determine those needs is slow and difficult. As a temporary solution to the County-wide communication system, the county estimates that \$3,000,000 would provide a system that would link agencies appropriately when significant multi-response is required. Rather than each city or the county pursuing the available funds, all agencies should jointly ascertain what U.S. Department of Homeland Security is requiring and whether those needs can be met for this project. With the County Office of Emergency Services acting as the lead agency, they could develop a grant application that represents all the agencies in Solano County.

Response: Solano County Office of Emergency Services has just received approval for the FY04 Homeland Security Grant that has funding of \$1,060,000 that will be dedicated to radio interoperability for Solano County. Hopefully this will be a start the process that will eventually alleviate Solano County's communication problems.

Finding #4: Dixon, Rio Vista and Benicia do not have hospital facilities and those that exist in Solano County have inadequate beds to accommodate a major incident. There is no trauma center or decontamination facility in the entire County. A system call Reddinet links all

medical facilities in the County with the County EOC, and provides an instant count of available beds and facilities. Currently, medical facilities located in Solano County depend on trauma centers located in Contra Costa and Napa Counties. In a major event, most likely, these facilities would not be available. The escalating growth of Solano County necessitates the exploration of facilities to provide for the safety of its residents. (5)

Recommendation #4: The Solano County Board of Supervisors review this issue and make it part of Solano County's future planning goals no later than 2005-2006. Solano County funding should include continuance of the Reddinet service.

Response: The County Administrator and Office of Emergency Services (OES) do not agree that there is no decontamination facility in the entire County. According to staff from the County's Health & Social Services Department and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) Agency, all hospitals in the County have decontamination facilities and hospital staffs have been trained in the use of those facilities. In addition, the County has been using grant funds to purchase new decontamination facilities for the County's hospitals.

The County Administrator and OES agree that there are no hospitals in Dixon, Rio Vista and Benicia, but do not necessarily agree that the lack of a hospital in each community is, in itself, the most critical issue in terms of emergency response to a major incident. The lack of bed capacity – specifically “surge” capacity to deal with the large increase in hospital beds that would accompany a major incident – is an area of significant concern. The hospitals in the County do have a plan to monitor bed availability and transfer patients as needed, but this would likely be insufficient in the case of a major incident. The County's Health & Social Services Department along with the Solano County EMS Agency has already begun the process to analyze this situation and identify what solutions might be possible. The County Administrator will recommend to the Board of Supervisors that it direct the Health & Social Services Department to continue these efforts and report back on the results as expeditiously as possible.

The County Administrator and OES agree that there are no trauma centers in the entire County. According to staff from the County EMS Agency, it is not likely that it would be cost-effective to open trauma center in Solano County due to the relatively low patient volume.¹ Solano County's EMS Agency has just completed an extensive trauma planning process and is preparing to present the resulting plan to the County's hospitals for review. This plan will identify how the County's hospital and emergency medical community can best deal with the need for trauma services in the County despite the absence of a trauma center here. The County Administrator will direct that this planning process continue and that a report be made to the Board as soon as possible.

Finding #5: There is no certified Hazardous Material (HazMat) Response Team in the County. Although fire and police personnel are trained to make a first on-site assessment, actual cleanup must be performed by qualified personnel. Currently the services of Napa County and the City of Sacramento are being used, but in the case of a major event, those

¹ Trauma system development, including determining whether a trauma center is warranted or feasible, is the responsibility of the local EMS Agency.

services may not be available. It is realized that the cost to establish a HazMat Team is large (\$2,000,000 plus), and the annual operating cost is estimated at \$350,000. But a joint effort by all the cities, districts and County may make this affordable. (4)

Recommendation #5: The County Office of Emergency Services take the lead in a study to determine the feasibility of establishing a County HazMat Team.

Response: The Solano County Office of Emergency has taken on the responsibility of establishing a County wide multi-agency Haz-Mat response team. OES is in the process of purchasing a HazMat vehicle and training HazMat team members who have already been identified by agency and individual. The team currently consists of 24 members from various Fire and Law agencies and is expected to be fully operational by January 2005. Equipment, training and the vehicle have all been acquired through Federal Grants.

Finding #6: A County Mobile Command Center has been acquired by a grant approved through U.S. Department of Homeland Security. This unit can be moved to an incident and become the Command Center for the responsible agency. It provides the capability to develop one communication frequency so all responding agencies have the capability of communicating and is equipped with backup power. (4)

Recommendation #6: Solano County ensure that training in the mobile command center be required for all emergency command personnel within the County. The County is to be commended for acquiring this state-of-the-art unit.

Response: The Office of Emergency Services is confident that Solano County has one of the most advanced state of the art Command Vehicles in the Country. This County is very fortunate that we were able to utilize Federal Grant funding in such an efficient manner.

Finding #7: Some of the agencies do not have dedicated space for a local EOC. In some cases the area being used for other purposes and must be transformed in an emergency, which may in turn, hamper the response time. (1)

Recommendation #7: Every effort should be made to provide dedicated space for an EOC. If space is unavailable, a dedicated area should consist of all necessary equipment and supplies to transform the area as soon as possible. Each local EOC needs to have back up power.

Response: Solano County OES is tentatively scheduled to move into the current County Architects office in 2005. This move will allow Solano County to have a dedicated EOC and will provide space for more drills and exercises. Solano County OES has no control over the cities ability to have dedicated Emergency Operations Centers.

Finding #8: Solano County has an automatic phone warning system for the entire County. Residents of an affected area can be warned by an automatic phone call with recorded

instructions as to the situation. Local radio stations and television are also used to inform the public. (4)

Recommendation #8: Agencies which have this valuable service should publicize this to their citizens.

Response: Solano County OES is currently working with the cities of Vallejo and Fairfield in an effort to establish a “City Watch” user’s group. This will give us the ability to consolidate telephone lines and increase our current capability significantly. As this program expands, the public will be made aware of its existence through effective public information releases.

Finding #9: Solano County Department of Health and Social Services is responsible for implementing State Medical Standards and Medical Response Procedures. However, it is unclear how the Department interacts with the Office of Emergency Services or its role in the EOC. (5)

Recommendation#9: The Solano County Chief Administrative Officer should define the role during emergencies of the Department of Health and Social Services during an emergency, including placement in the Solano County Emergency Operation Organization Chart with assigned duties and responsibilities.

Response: This recommendation has been accomplished in the new updated Emergency Operations Plans adopted by the Board of Supervisor’s on August 24, 2004.

Finding #10: A Solano County Multi-Agency Disaster Drill took place on November 13, 2003. The purpose was to test and train the appropriate personnel of law enforcement, fire service, emergency medical services, County Office of Emergency Services, Solano County Emergency Medical Services Agencies and the Public Health Department to respond to a terrorist event involving mass casualties and significant destruction or the potential thereof. This was the first such drill in Solano County. The drill revealed an overall lack of communication and leadership. Objectives of the drill were only partially achieved or not achieved at all. The results of this drill emphasize the need for a central authority to coordinate a disaster event that involves mutual aid. (5)

Recommendation#10: The County Administrative Office should take the lead and determine the necessary action to resolve the non-achieved objectives of this exercise.

Response: The Solano County Office of Emergency Services is currently working with all of the agencies that participated in the November 2003, exercise in an effort to mitigate those command and control issues discovered during this exercise. Significant improvement has been made since the exercise in that the new Command post has provided the capability of establishing tactical channels on designated frequencies that will allow unified commanders to talk to each other more efficiently.

Finding #11: Agencies tend to be territorial and focus on their own needs when planning for community services which may create obstacles when trying to develop mutual aid throughout the County that will benefit all citizens in a time of crisis. The terrorist actions of September 11, 2001 created a need for reassessment of the procedures to safeguard our population. The formation of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security brought together 42 agencies under one department requiring a major coordination effort, not only the U.S. Department of Homeland Security but with states, counties and cities so that information and responses can occur both up and down the organizational chart. (6)

Recommendation#11: Elected County officials, county administrators and City Managers need to reassess the methods by which Emergency Operating Systems are developed and implemented to break down territorial lines and to ensure that the emergency service needs are being met. Just as many Federal government departments were combined under U.S. Department of Homeland Security to establish the most efficient and effective way to respond to various incidents, so should state, counties and cities review existing emergency response structures. To make this happen, elected officials should take the initial step to form a County-wide committee that would include representatives from the State Senate and Assembly offices, County Board of Supervisors and City Councils. At this level, an assessment of County needs should take place and appropriate direction given to responsible County and City staff to develop a seamless Emergency Operating Plan throughout the County.

Response: This recommendation will be examined closely by the County Administrator's Office. If there is any feasible way to incorporate this concept into reality, it will occur over a period of time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael D. Johnson", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Michael D. Johnson,
County Administrator,
Director, Office of Emergency Services